DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 257 105 CS 208 944

AUTHOR Coe, Richard M.
TITLE A Heuristic for Analyzing a Particular Type of Writing Prior to Learning How to Produce It.
PUB DATE Mar 84
NOTE 20p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (35th, New York City, NY, March 29-31, 1984).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Content Analysis; *Heuristics; Higher Education; Language Processing; *Prior Learning; *Writing Evaluation; *Writing Instruction; *Writing Processes; Writing Skills

ABSTRACT

An assignment given to students at the end of an advanced composition class empowers students by helping them grasp principles and develop abilities that allow them to get beyond needing teachers. The crux of the assignment is a heuristic for analyzing any particular type of writing for the purpose of learning to produce it. The students are assigned to choose a specific type of writing and then to create a mini-manual for people who might want to do that type of writing. This must be an empirical assignment based on the students' analyses of samples of the discourse. The result of this assignment is a formal causal explanation by analysis of a hierarchy of constraints. The heuristic is supposed to help generate a description of the constraints within which writers work. The assignment is based on the assumption that the nature of the constraints and their priority varies from one discourse set to another, and because the immediate focus is on the written products students analyze, the success of the assignment depends upon the students' prior understanding of writing as process as well as their understanding of the practical relationship between process and product. (An example of the heuristic given to the class and samples of students' work are included.) (DF)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED257105

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

A HEURISTIC

For Analyzing a Particular Type of Writing

Prior to Learning How to Produce It

Prof. Richard M. Coe
English Dept.
Simon Fraser University
Burnaby, BC V5A 1S6
Canada

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Richard M. Coe
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CS 208 944

A HEURISTIC

For Analysing a Particular Type of Writing

Prior to Learning How to Produce It

Amidst the pressures of the "eighties" to be pragmatic and provide students with immediately useful "job skills," I try to remember the old adage about the longterm virtues of giving someone a fishing pole instead of a fish. Thus this article is not only about the assignment with which I end my advanced composition course, but also about a pedagogical process, a way of teaching, a way of empowering students to transcend their need for teachers, to learn without teachers.[1] Although rigorous and demanding considerable discipline, this is in one critical sense a "sixties" assignment: it attempts to do what really ought to be done instead of settling, in the way of the "eighties," for what is "possible." It empowers students by helping them grasp principles and develop abilities that allow them to get beyond needing teachers.

I use this assignment with my advanced composition students (and also in teacher training), usually as an optional assignment. Many of those who choose to do it are planning careers as writers or involving considerable writing. But Susan Fahey has used a simplified version of the heuristic as the basis of the first discussion in her writing-for-engineers course.

---

[1]Cf., Peter Elbow, Writing Without Teachers (New York: Oxford, 1973).

The Assignment

The crux of the assignment is a heuristic for analyzing any particular type of writing for the purpose of learning to produce it. It is crucial to remember that this is a heuristic, not a list of questions to be answered; for any given discourse only some questions matter. The heuristic attempts to make conscious and explicit much of what free-lance writers do before adapting a piece to a particular medium. Not surprisingly, the questions make sense to students only toward the end of the course, after they have met concepts like "cumulative sentence" and "level of generality." That is why Fahey had to create a simplified version for use in an introductory lecture-discussion.

The context and instructions for the assignment are presented in my Form and Substance: An Advanced Rhetoric[2] (although I hadn't really finished thinking the assignment through when my deadline arrived). The students are assigned to choose a specific type of writing and then to create a mini-manual for people who might want to do that type of writing. Although they may refer to existing manuals as

---

[2](New York and Toronto: Wiley; Scott,Foresman, 1981), pp. 359-367. Cf., "Bernice W. White, "Looking for Books? Two 'Advanced Composition' Texts and One Draftee," Journal of Advanced Composition, 2: 1&2 (1981), pp. 175-179; and Richard Marius, "Review," College Composition and Communication, 35:2 (May 1984), pp. 242-243.

secondary sources, the key is that this must be an empirical assignment, based on the students' analyses of samples of the discourse - because one object of the assignment is to create self-reliance and self-confidence.

The heuristic I hand out to my students looks like this:

A HEURISTIC
For Analysing a Particular Type of Writing
Prior to Learning How to Produce It

Subject Matter:

1. What kind of material is usually treated? Does there seem to be a shared heuristic that some or all of the writers use to generate their material? Could you invert such a heuristic? [See Form and Substance, 63-73.]

2. Are there certain key terms or standard analogies that recur? Are there "buzz words"? Is there a standard jargon? [See Form and Substance, 117-118.]

3. Do the writers seem to share approaches, methods or techniques for handling the material? How are these writings focused? [See Form and Substance, 49-53]

4. Is there a common persona that the writers adopt? Do the writers take a particular stance? Can you detect shared values? How formal is the word choice and usage? [See Form and Substance, 156 ff.]

Rhetorical Context:

5. What basic purposes does the writing serve? Is it primarily expressive, explanatory, persuasive, or literary? Are distinct purposes emphasized in different parts? [See Form and Substance, 108 ff.]

6. Who reads this type of writing? What do you know about--and

what sorts of assumptions do the writers seem to be making about the knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and vested interests of the readers? [See Form and Substance, 112-119.]

7. Where is this type of writing usually published? Is it likely to be read casually or seriously, for entertainment or for use? If the writing must be accepted by an editor before it reaches its readers, what can you surmise about the editor's motives and criteria?

Structure and Style:

8. Is there a standard format or typical structure for the whole writing or any part of it? Which of the basic patterns of development are used regularly? Are different partterns used in different parts? How do the writings begin? How do the writings end? What sorts of transitions predominate? How long are the paragraphs and how are they typically structured? What is the relationship among levels of generality within typical paragraphs and for whole pieces of writing?

9. How long are most of the writings in your sample? How long and difficult are the words and sentences? What is the level of readability? Do any particular sentence patterns predominate? Is the style nominalized or is more meaning carried by verbs and adverbs? To what extent are there overt figures of speech? How would you rate this writing on a scale of abtraction? Does the text have texture (i.e., many embedded or cumulative modifiers)?

10. What is missing? What unique features does this discourse have which have not been elicited by the preceding questions?

"Form and Substance" refers to Form and Substance: An Advanced Rhetoric by Richard M. Coe (New York and Toronto: Wiley; Scott, Foresman, 1981).

Here are some samples of what students in my third year composition course have written in response to this assignment (with some detail deleted to save space).

Subject Matter:

[Sailing magazines, specifically Pacific Yachting]

. . . [C]oastal cruising articles have several common characteristics. The material is informative and entertaining and usually describes a specific cruise, discussing familiar . . . locations in the process. Details of navigation, tides, charts and coastal scenery are included, and interspersed with specialised information about the boat itself: the size and make, the type of hull and engine, the standing and running rigging, and the overall condition of the vessel. . . . Weather conditions are stressed. Amusing anecdotes and minor incidents are included. For example, Chettleburgh writes, "Chunks of kiln-processed stone lay in sorry looking heaps along the waterfront. We tossed several pieces into the saltchuck; they bobbed pumice-like back to shore." [Anne Jackson]

[Christian children's stories of the sort written by C.S. Lewis and Madeleine L'Engle]

[These stories] are based on the Christian vision that life in this universe is marked by a cosmic battle between good and evil. . . . In this spiritual "battle of the ages," initiated by the fallen angels, pride is at the root of al evil; faith, hope, and love the fruit of all good. . . . The traditional vision of the heroic Christian "soldier" is at the heart of these fantasies.

But . . . these writers celebrate the Christian sense of childlike spirituality in heroes who are primarily, though not exclusively, children. . . . And, importantly, these heroes and heroines, fighting spiritual battles in another time and space, have a decisive impact on the affairs of their own world. . . .

This new version of the Christian hero-pilgrim, celebrating children as spiritual soldiers, has its framework in biblical thinking. . . . The intent is to illustrate that there is a common universal truth: whatever is true about human experience on earth, perceived through faith, is also true in fantasy, and vice versa. . . .

[The] biblical references support the larger Christian framework. [The] writers focus on values that are integral, never additional, to their stories. The references matter insomuch as they indicate how and why the characters must act in a sacrificial, heroic manner. The lesson is always the same: ordinary children can and indeed ought to exercise spiritual heroism. . . .

Significantly, there is a common persona telling these sorts of stories of children. [The writers] speak in the omniscient narratorial voice, projecting a tone of authority quite in keeping with their belief in an orderly, rational universe. . . . [These writers] share the childlike persona of one who is very much involved in the story, of one who, like the reader, holds his breath in the face of danger and cheers when good wins out. They see and believe with a child's eye: there is no "adult" agnosticism here. Similarly, they share a wonderful sense of humour over human foibles. . . . This human, peculiarly childlike laughter, perhaps more than anything else, convinces readers that ordinary children can become cosmic heroes.

The basic structure . . . is the journey motif. [The] protagonists are children who, like other children, live with adults who may not always understand them, go to schools where peers may bully them, and are very likely to have personal "growing pains." . . . The journey format has these five chronological parts: (1) The children stumble into the supernatural world as if by chance. . . . Once they are in a different world, it becomes obvious that they were called for a purpose. (2) The children are confronted with an evil so great that it threatens the annihilation of themselves and the given world. . . . In every case the children realize that they have been called to avert disaster. (3) Much of the plot consists of the children learning how to combat and overcome evil. . . . [T]he training period is no carefree game and the battle is deadly serious. (4) Once the victory is won, the children participate in its glories. The personal joy of winning is surpassed by an appreciation of the greater glories of a universe restored. . . . (5) Finally, the children return to their own world, recognizing that the fantasy was much more than an idle dream. . . . [C]hildren learn that thoughts and actions always count, and that they must overcome less-than-moral tendencies within themselves before they can overcome any larger evil.

[Rock record reviews]

A magazine like Rolling Stone does use considerable musical and technical jargon, but it is a vocabulary that is quite familiar to many people, particularly, of course, to people who are interested in music and who read record reviews. Most people know what "funk" is, or at least have a good enough idea that they won't be confused when they see the word in context. Similarly, words like "overdub," "mix," 'upbeat," and "cuts" or "tracks" can be used without fear of their being misunderstood . . . [Peter McLennan]

[Feminist newspapers, such as Kinesis]

. . . if you write "history" you will be published as "herstory" - a term commonly seen in feminist publications. . . . Women are also not termed in relationship to their appearance: you would never write, she was "stunning" or a "knock-out." To avoid the relationship to man in woman, you will see "wimmin," "womyn," or "womon" used. Women should be defined by words that term them natural, capable, and independent. [Grace Vibe]

[Vancouver Magazine]

Rossiter presents a humorous persona. Indeed, humor is a prominent element in many Vancouver Magazine feature articles. . . . An equally salient characteristic of the magazine's persona is that the writer is seen as capable and well-informed. This image is conveyed through the vast amount of detail, examples, quotations and anecdotes that permeate through the journalist's work. Moreover, the writer is critical. He/She does not merely accept facts without question. If a subject's response appears contradictory, the journalist takes care to point out this paradox. In a recent profile on Erwin Swangard, for example, ... [Brian Foden]

[Movie reviews for Cosmopolitan]

Look at any Cosmopolitan cover and what do you see? An alluring Medusa-haired solitary siren of no specific age (other than young) in full temptress regalia: kohl-rimmed eyes, sexy mouth, plunging neckline with more flesh exposed than covered, and exotic wraps accessorized by outlandish jewelry. . . .

The reader, typically a woman . . . , is as young as the model on the Cosmo cover and may secretly crave the exotic, sexual sophistication and beauty the model presents. The reader is also world-wise enough to prize the model's unusual clothing and accessories, and sensitive enough to fashion, style and standards of attractiveness to appreciate the model's make-up and hair. Homemaker or student, secretary or nurse, teacher or interior designer, the reader is most likely to be a rising or aspiring professional attracted by the provocative concerns [titled] on the cover surrounding the central image of the model, such as diet, sex, relationships, job strategies and marriage or divorce.

The women who read Cosmo are "on the go." They pick up the magazine to get quick, bright, glimpses of fashion, fancy, fad, and fiction. They expect reviews (of books, records, or films) which measure entertainment value of the item discussed [for which they will change] hard-earned money.

With the reader's expectations in mind, a Cosmo film review should fulfill three purposes.

1. To inform readers of popular current films: actors, actresses, directors and screenwriters involved.
2. To present a plot summary that is fast paced, short, opulently described to satisfy readers' interests in entertainment, fantasy, excitment, pleasure, colour and action.
3. To encourage readers to answer titillating situational problems raised by the review by seeing the film; to suggest a prediction of readers' satisfaction once they've seen the film discussed.

The film review should focus on the content of the film, the actors and actresses and the situations or problems faced by the characters; it is not a critique of the film as an art form - it is essentially an extended plot summary which includes "big names." . . . [Lynn Upton]

[Profiles of famous mountaineers for popular mountaineering magazines]

Be prepared to have your article sensationalized; indeed, there should be something in it that can be sold sensationally on the cover. . . .

As far as the editors are concerned, your article will be judged on whether or not it can help sell the magazine, based on the editors' concept of audience appeal. This form of article has been published most often in Outside magazine . . . . With a Fry Readability Factor ranging generally between Grades 10 and 12, this magazine is meant to be read along a scale from casual to serious, for both entertainment and serious use; articles of the type you will be writing should be thought-provoking enough to provoke discussion but casual enough to be read for entertainment. Outside's market is a competitive one, its chief competitor being Backpacker . . . . Their shared audience [determined by an analysis of advertisements, article appearance, and content] is invariably outdoors-oriented and focussed on adventure and risk activities. Everyone pictured in the ads is young (25-35 years), white, and apparently upwardly mobile and/or affluent. There is a decidedly macho-oriented, dominant-male ethic portrayed in the ads, though overall there are probably more women represented. (This may explain why, although there are numerous female climbers who fulfill all criteria for this kind of article, all published articles so far have been about men.) . . . [T]he writers assume an educated audience with little geographical knowledge and little informed understanding of the significance of specific mountaineering achievements. . . . The readers are assumed to be interested in climbing, but probably from a spectator's point-of-view. What they are really interested in is personalities, motivation, achievements and conflict (issues). [Mitchell Sulkers]

Structure and Style:

[Ski magazines]

The title draws the reader to the story's first lines, and the first paragraph should, likewise, lead the reader on to the body of the story. Ski writers often start with an analogy or a suggestion of interesting material to follow:

> Some people just can't stand success. Show me a guy who has the world on a string and I'll show you a guy searching for a pair of scissors. When th ski run of life becomes smooth and effortless, some people go off looking for a mogul field.

Skiers are notorious story-tellers and certainly this enticing little item is more likely to lead us onward than an outline of the story written in essay form. . . .

Getting to the writing itself, sentences are usually short and interest is generated by packing in modifiers. . . . [A] few well-placed words are best because they trigger a similar experience in the reader and he becomes more involved as a result.

A sense of action is also created by composing paragraphs which rarely exceed two or three sentences. . . . Usually the first sentence introduces an idea and the following ones expand on it: facts, descriptions, implications . . . . [O]ne idea soon gives way to another, and in this manner interest is sustained. Take this example from a recent issue of Powder, for instance:

> At times there is a melding of man with mountain across impossible terrain. A smooth give and take between the two which spills over defined boundaries to become one. "Like pouring 30-wt. oil over a sea of ball-bearings." This accomplished, it is said to take one to a higher state of consciousness.

This short, four-sentence paragraph uses analogy, quotation, and humour to amplify the "melding of man with mountain," and it exemplifies the blending of detail with brevity . . . .

Like the sentences and paragraphs from which they are made, articles are quite short, typically ranging in length from one thousand to two thousand words. . . . Usually writers have an "angle" which they develop . . . . The last paragraph always sums up the story in some way. This can mean anything from reiterating the main point to extending the story's implications, to involving the audience in one last persona note, but it always rounds out the article - as any final paragraph should. [Peter Vogler]

[Quill and Quire]

The most typical structure has supporting samples that constitute the first two paragraphs with a partition revealed in the third. . . . Because the particulars of the issue are defined before the issue itself, the reader can often generalize what the article is about before arriving at the theme line. Moreover, the typical paragraph is structured so that the sentence with the lowest level of generality comes first. In addition, the article as a whole typically becomes more general towards its conclusion. . . . The ending of an article usually restates the pertinant points . . . that have already been elaborately discussed in the body, although there is also the tendency to make an ethical appeal. . . . The writers also have a greater tendency to repeat certain phrases from sentences in previous paragraphs than to use a [transition] word. [Dawn Egan]

[Vancouver Magazine]

A common feature of these articles is long, information-packed cumulative sentences like the following: "Meanwhile, after graduating third in the 1956 UBC law-school class of 60 (class-mate Bob Guile: 'He was serious. Gawd, he was serious.'), Berger was making a name for himself with Shulman, Tupper and Company, a fiesty, anti-Establishment law firm, representing workers up and down the coast." . . . The introduction differs in form and [subject] matter from the rest of the article . . . because it performs a different purpose. . . , to provide a context for the entire piece (a context that also, presumably, interests the reader). Quite often this, purpose is achieved by presenting a narrative that sets the tone . . . . [T]he common function of this magazine's conclusions is to give the reader the impression he/she has arrived full-circle. That is, the ending often refers the reader back to the beginning (or at least back to some early part). . . .

Since these difficult words are combined into complex sentences structures, at least the equivalent of a high-school education is required in order to feel comfortable with the level of readability. Another characteristic . . . is that present-tense, active words predominate, calling forth compelling, vivid images. Analogies are common. So are metaphors. . . . Th[e] substitution of interesting synonyms in place of words that would otherwise be needlessly repeated appears to be an "eleventh commandment" to which Vancouver Magazine writers strictly adhere. [Brian Foden]

[movie reviews for Cosmopolitan]

Reviews average eight sentences and two hundred words. The sentence structure varies in complexity but short simple statements of five words or so are usually used at the beginning (as an introductory remark setting the tone of the review) or at the end (as a short snappy summary statement). Compound sentences average thirty-two words long, but sentences can vary from four to seventy words. The level of readability aimed for here is at the high school graduate level since above high school education of the readership is expected.

The format of the review does not vary from issue to issue. Each review begins with an attractive "title," usually three or four words long, which may be a pun on an actor/actress/director's name or a film's theme. . . . [A]n average eight-sentence paragraph could follow the guideline below:

Sentence One (introductory hook) should (a) state some factor in the film of special interest to the reader - actor, director or screenwriter's previous successes or failures; a plot summary with a twist; a rhetorical question; or a statement to establish the theme of the review - (b) full title of the film in bold type here (or in second sentence).
Sentence Two states more specifically the film's origin with mention and subtle evaluation of the director and screenwriter(s).
Sentence Three elaborates basic plot, names actors/actresses involved in lead roles.
Sentence Four commends portrayals of characters by leading actor/actress through use of winning adjectives. For example . . . .
Sentence Five further elaborates plot (if necessary) or embellishes virtues of one actor or actress or mentions historical relationship of film to

predecessors in the genre (if common knowledge) or previous work by actor, actress, director or screenwriter.

Sentence Six lists supporting actors and actresses and roles in plot.

Sentence Seven suggests a question which can only be answered by seeing the film. (E.g., "Splash": What's a mermaid supposed to do?)

Sentence Eight summarizes with an explicit statment which exhorts reader to see the film by one of the following techniques: (a) a direct recommendation, (b) a cant off tidbit ("should be seen to be believed"), (c) a "teaser" conclusion.

. . . The reviews must present a witty, clever, friendly reviewer. Some guidelines for the style of the review are below:

1. Whenever possible recreate scenes by the use of visual vocabulary.
2. Be positive in the review; do not criticize openly; make all movies sound worthwhile . . . .
3. Emphasize energy, colour, exotic setting and people, action by the use of rhythm and alliteration.
4. Remember that no specialized technical language of the film industry is needed by the reader.
5. Whenever possible present the film as a delightful set of problems on the model of "boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl" or some variant.
6. Have fun writing the review; it will show.

The style should be spicy, visual, exciting and fun. The persona of the reviewer shoud likewise exude exaggerated exuberance, risque witticisms (a la Oscar Wilde) and gossipy intelligence using word groups like "sunny showgirl or shadowy virtue," "bullient eternally boyish depths of director Steven Speilberg's mischievious movie mad soul," and "mightily mysterious hunk." . . . Truth is not so important as the appearance of truth; therefore overstatement is not only allowed but encouraged in Cosmo film reviews. [Lynn Upton]

Some of the students who do this assignment schematize their findings as heuristics to guide invention and/or revision. The piece on Christian children's stories of the Lewis/L'Engle sort ended this way:

To summarize, I would like to conclude with the following revison heuristic:

SUBJECT MATTER:

1. Does the plot work as a cosmic battle?
2. Are children the primary heroes?
3. Is the biblical framework an integral part of the story?
4. Does the persona share a child's sense both for what is important and humorous?

RHETORICAL CONTEXT:

1. Is the main purpose to provide pleasure for children of any background?
2. Is the story "honest" literature in that it fulfills the expectation of being a good story first?

STRUCTURE AND STYLE:

1. Does the story follow the five-part journey format?
2. Does the narrative illustrate the importance of morals?
3. Is spirituality described in concrete, physical imagery?
4. If word, sentence, and paragraph length depart from the average norm, does this add to the text? Is it made intelligbile through careful punctuation and "average qualifiers?

The Theory

Having presented the "Monday morning" pragmatics of this assignment, I should now - after offering all anti-intellectuals who do not believe in the utility of theory a chance to bail out - provide the technical, theoretical context that explains the structure of the heuristic.

The result of this assignment is formally causal explanation by analysis of a hierarchy of constraints.[3] The theoretical underpinning is the assumption that writing is a stochastic, equifinal, and multifinal process.[4] I use this terminology and this model for explaining process because those who have studied the composing process seriously are virtually unanimous in declaring that any linear model is an oversimplification: writers simply do not compose in neat stages, finishing this subprocess before starting that one. But the invocation of the term recursive, while it does allow us to retain our essentially lineal mindset and continue imaging the composing process as a line (albeit a line which may be described as "an octopus eating a plate of spaghetti"[5]), begs the question. Operationally, what means this recursivity? In practice, it seems to mean that writers can leap at will from one stage to another whenever they wish - at which point one might ask what means stage? For in any ordinary usage, if there

---

[3]See Form and Substance, pp. 300-320.

[4]For those readers who believe only students should look up words in dictionaries while people who write for teachers should avoid using words the teachers might not know, I should say that stochastic (from the Greek, to aim) refers to purposive processes, whether they be goal-directed, goal-oriented, or goal-seeking. Equifinal refers to the notion that there may be more than one satisfactory route to a particular end. Multifinal refers to the notion that there may be several satisfactory ends that achieve the same particular purpose. This terminology comes from that attempt to model "organized complexity" - a good title for the writing process - which goes under the name of General System Theory.

[5]Douglas Brent, "Composition Teaching: Subverting Linear Structures," Inkshed, 3:6 (December 1984), p. 1.

is no temporal order, there are no stages. In short, at some cost in logic, the term recursive allows us to retain our lineality while denying it - and really to say positively nothing at all. (At any event, for pedagogical purposes, we reduce the "recursive" process to lineality anyhow.)

What I am, somewhat piquedly, asserting here is that we need instead to attempt something much more difficult. We need to conceive a radically new way of thinking about process that uses no lineal metaphor (neither simple, nor "recursive"). We will find the basis for such a "new way" in the German philosophical tradition that descends from Leibnitz through Kant to Hegel - a tradition which (if we can believe Hegel) originates with the ancient Sophists, who were, after all, the first rhetoricians. We will find this same basis closer to home (and in English) if we look to Context Theory - which brings us back to I.A. Richards' The Philosophy of Rhetoric, as well as Gregory Bateson, General System Theory, "eco-logic," and so forth.

This theoretical tangent has multiple implications, a few of which I have discussed elsewhere.[6] Here, however, there is one central implication. A complex stochastic process like writing is not best described by attempting to follow temporally as writers write - because the whole point is that, efficiency

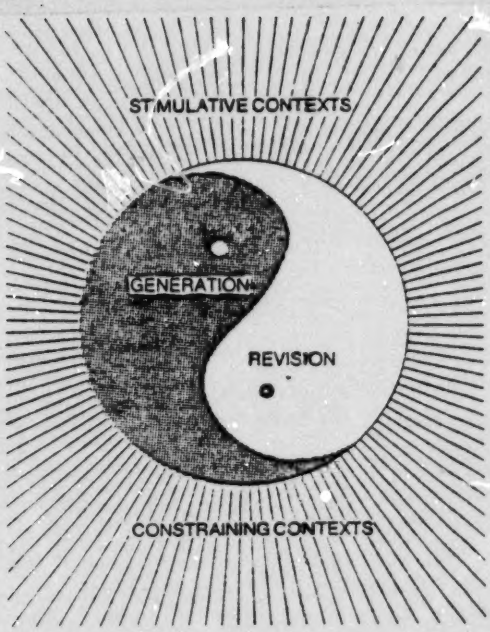
---

[6]See my "Rhetoric 2001," Freshman English News, 3:1 (1974); "Eco-logic for the Composition Classroom," College Composition and Communication, 26:3 (1975); "Closed System Composition," ETC., A Review of General Semantics, 32:4 (1975); and Form and Substance, pp. 290-320.

aside, a writer may work in any order as long as the final product is satisfactory. The process is best understood by describing not the writer, but the parameters of the task. These parameters - best modelled as a hierarchy of constraints - define the process, even though different writers may perform the process in different sequences.

[Insert Figure 1 about here.]

Thus the heuristic presented here guides writers to a description of the parameters within which a particular type of writing should be produced. This heuristic is supposed to help generate a description of the constraints within which writers work. Thus the heuristic represents a 3-leveled hierarchy. Ordinarily the rhetorical context would be the highest level of constraint, though in academic situations (and hence in the handout) the subject matter may be highest. The hierarchy is, of course, not absolute or unidirectional: all levels are presumed to be interdetermined. The assignment is, in fact, based on the assumption that the nature of the constraints and their priority varies from one discourse set to another. And, precisely because the immediate focus is on the written products students analyze, the success of the assignment depends upon the students' prior understanding of writing as process as well as their understanding of the practical relationship between process and product.



THE CREATIVE COMPOSING PROCESS

Figure 1

BEST COPY AVAILABLE